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Ontario's students, educators need more mental health supports, says newly released report

Ontario schools are facing a mental health crisis and more supports and staff, a report by the non-profit People for Education suggests.

The report is based on the results of a survey of more than 1,200 principals at approximately 1,000 Ontario public schools.

It found that many students across Ontario continue to struggle with the "aftereffects" of the pandemic, including increased behavioural issues, difficulties with self-regulation, and other unaddressed mental health challenges.

The report also suggested that there is a lack of resources to respond to the worsening mental health in the classroom.

About 91 per cent of school principals, in fact, reported needing some or a lot of support for students' mental health and well-being.

Only 9 per cent said they have regular scheduled access to a mental health/addictions specialist or nurse, while 46 per cent said they have no access at all.

Nearly a third (28 per cent) of all elementary and secondary schools reported having no access to a psychologist, virtually on in person. This is almost double the percentage of schools that reported no access in 2011.

The data also found that rural schools are less likely to have access to psychologists, social workers, and mental health specialists compared to those in urban areas.

In some cases, principals said they have funding for mental health



workers, but none are available in their communities.

Just over half (56 per cent) of participating elementary schools and 64 per cent of secondary schools reported collaborating with local mental health organizations.

Further, an overwhelming majority of schools (80 per cent) said they need more support staff like educational assistants, administrators and counsellors.

Principals also noted that the mental health and well-being of their staff is of concern with many reporting burnout. This, they said, is leading to increased absenteeism and more pressure being put on remaining staff.

Those who responded to the survey said they want the Ontario Ministry of Education to "find sufficient staff, increase access to family and community supports, and recognize the depth of the impact of the pandemic on school communities."

People for Education is also calling for the creation of a cross-sector

Liberal, Conservative supporters 'gridlocked' in voting intentions: poll

Liberal and Conservative supporters are again freshly deadlocked in their voting intentions in Canada, new polling released Monday appears to show.

The "statistical tie" comes after a spike in support for the Conservative party last fall following the post-leadership convention when Pierre Poilievre was elected leader in September 2022, the Ipsos poll conducted exclusively for Global News found.

Now, as these neck-and-neck results have held fairly constant since the 2019 election - when Canadians elected a Liberal minority government - voting intentions have moved back to familiar territory.

"It's really the Groundhog Day of polls. We're in this gridlock and it seems to have persisted for a long period of time," Darrell Bricker, CEO of Ipsos Public Affairs, told Global News.

"What the results show is that the little advantage that the Conservatives picked up in the fall of last year when they elevated Pierre Poilievre to the position of leader has gone away. The Liberals and Conservatives are basically tied again," he said.

That means, if a federal election were to take place tomorrow, the Liberals under Prime Minister Justin Trudeau would receive 33 per cent of the vote, tied with Poilievre's Conservative party, the poll suggests.

In the 2019 election, neither the Liberals nor Conservatives hit the 170-seat threshold needed for a

Quebec labour tribunal orders nurses' union to stop threatening mass resignation

The threat from a Quebec nurses' union to announce the mass resignation of several hundred of its members as a pressure tactic is illegal, a Quebec labour tribunal has ruled.

In a decision released Saturday, the Tribunal administratif du travail ordered the Mauricie and Centre-du-Quebec chapter of the Fédération interprofessionnelle de la santé du Québec (FIQ) to stop encouraging mass resignation, which is described as an "illegal concerted action, prejudicial to a service to which the population is entitled."

The tribunal noted the union has been working to gather the signatures of 500 nurses who are ready to resign over the Mauricie-Centre-du-Quebec regional health authority's scheduling changes.

"Quebec premier asks unions for flexibility amid collective bargaining talks. Workers, the decision read, have also been refusing to input some data into patient files. The changes the union is protesting include the obligation to work a certain number of weekend shifts."

In a written decision, Judge Myriam Bédard ordered the union and its members to stop both pressure tactics, which could cause harm to essential health services.

"Quebec's largest nurses' union submits complaint with UN agency over 'forced labour' Bédard ordered union members to withdraw their resignations presented



in this context of pressure tactics." Bédard also ordered the union to "immediately and publicly" indicate whether it intends to comply.

The union wrote on its Facebook page that it was "disappointed but not surprised" by the decision, adding it would discuss the matter in a general assembly on Monday.

The union also rallied outside a hospital in Drummondville on Sunday to protest what it described as the employer's "unilateral decision to modify their employment contract," which will force nurses to work duties they hadn't done in years.

The workers "will not let themselves be intimidated or coerced by a representative employer that uses the [labour tribunal] to silence them," the union said in a statement published on its website.

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This is how Canada's alcohol tax hike will impact Ontario

The price of alcohol is set to rise in just over a month with a tax increase on tap for Ontario, along with the rest of the country.

A 3 percent federal tax increase on beer, wine and spirits will go into effect on April 1.

This excise tax automatically climbs every year in accordance with the rate of inflation. When it was introduced in 2017, the federal tax on alcohol rose by two percent.

The Liquor Control Board of Ontario (LCBO) told CTV News Toronto that its prices are based on a variety of factors: the supplier's price plus federal import and export duties, freight, levies, a standard mark-up, HST and container deposit.

"Our suppliers set their own pricing (subject to minimum retail prices) and have the option to adjust their pricing up or down throughout the year in response to currency fluctuations, federal taxes or freight rate changes, or price changes by their competitors," an LCBO spokesperson said.



Retail price increases are determined by alcohol producers, the provincial liquor board explained. Meaning, price hikes that come into effect on April 1 at Ontario liquor stores will vary product-by-product.

"What we are forecasting is if this goes ahead, the price of a 12 pack in Ontario, given everything going on, would go up about 10 per cent," CJ Hillie, President of Beer Canada, told

CTV News Toronto. That increase would be due to a compilation of cost increases across the board for the beer sector, including the price of barley, corn and transportation, alongside the tax.

"It would be more of a gradual thing," Hillie said about the potential price hike. "That sticker shock is too much. Breweries would look to do it in increments throughout the year." In an effort to avoid that scenario,

he is pushing for a freeze on the tax until inflation returns to Canada's two per cent target. "It's just the worst time to pile on and make things worse," Hillie said, pointing to the rough patch of pandemic years when the hospitality sector shutdown, dragging sales down by about 3.5 per cent last year.

Advocacy for the tax freeze comes as a new report, funded by Health Canada, found consuming more than two drinks per week constituted a moderate health risk due to evidence linking alcohol to cancer. These guidelines marked a significant change from the previous understanding that men could have up to 15 drinks per week with low risk, and women up to 10.

Restaurants Canada, a national not-for-profit association representing the industry, is also calling for a deferral of the upcoming federal tax increase in order to grant food and beverage businesses more room to "absorb another tax increase at this vulnerable time," the organization said earlier this week.

Canada's Chamber of Commerce has called on the federal government to repeal the automatic tax increase or at minimum, freeze it.

Woman spends months calling Air Canada, Toronto police but still can't get lost luggage back

Almost six months have passed and Toronto woman Shamita Kumar is still looking for a piece of luggage her mom was supposed to have with her in Sri Lanka.

"My aunt was sick, so we were really there to take care of her," Kumar told CTV News Toronto in an interview.

They packed a variety of things in the suitcase, like bras for a mastectomy and other items to help Kumar's aunt through treatment. But, Kumar said the bag never even left Canada.

"It moved to Montreal and then it came back to Toronto," she said.

Kumar could see where the bag was thanks to an AirTag that was inside. She said she watched the bag travel along Highway 401, until it stopped at a storage facility in Etobicoke, Ont.

"We've been in contact with [Air Canada] for over six months now just trying to figure out how we can get our bag back, or compensation or something," she said.



facility, peek inside the unit, and said he could see bags with labels on them.

Toronto police investigated what they said were four reports of stolen luggage, but ultimately declared the luggage had been obtained legally.

When Kumar called the storage facility to ask about her bag, she was told Air Canada is not a client of that location, and that she'd need to get police involved or permission to go inside - so, she called police.

"They kind of brushed it off saying, 'They can't really help you with what you want, but there's a story that was very similar to yours that was put out recently, so maybe if you contact the person in the story, maybe they can help you get to your luggage,'" Kumar recalled, adding it would have been "helpful if police" at least [filed] a report or [took] us to

that storage unit."

A Toronto police spokesperson told CTV News Toronto the service "did investigate several reports of lost luggage in January and ultimately determined they weren't criminal matters, as it was related to the airline carrier's policy around unclaimed luggage. We are no longer investigating."

"I don't accept the theory that just because there's a contract between an airline and a third party that it makes it legal to steal someone's bag," Gabor Lukacs, president of Air Passengers Rights, told CTV News Toronto. "I am shocked that it is happening again."

CTV News Toronto reached out to Air Canada to request an interview but no one was made available. A spokesperson did say they knew about Kumar's case and were still

looking for the bag.

Kumar said they have also not received any compensation for the lost luggage.

"It just seems really suspicious given the fact that it's a storage unit but it's not associated with Air Canada, but that's where all the luggage [is] apparently," she said.

Her mother's flight was with Air Canada and Sri Lankan Airlines. According to Kumar, they got some money back from Sri Lankan Airlines. But since the bag never left Canada, they were told by the airline there was nothing more they could do.

"Sri Lankan Airlines was a lot more helpful," said Kumar. "But I don't think that it was their responsibility."

According to the Montreal Convention, if a piece of luggage is not found by an airline after 21 days, compensation must be paid.

"It doesn't mean that the airline can stop searching for it," said Lukacs. "I would urge the police to continue investigating because based on my understanding on how airlines and relations work, this is not a normal matter. This is not a civil matter anymore."

For Kumar, what's so frustrating is she can't find where her bag is, and it's just a 30-minute drive from her house. She and her mother have sent numerous emails to Air Canada with bag descriptions and screenshots of the AirTag, but they have yet to get any traction.

"It just seems silly at this point where we know where it is, we can tell you exactly the location," said Kumar. "All we need is just Air Canada to support us to go get that bag itself."

against Quetta opener Jason Roy. "Would you still have supported Islamabad to win even if they were chasing 211 [in place of Quetta]?" The swift answer was a big "yes!"

The respective fan backing from the energetic NSK spectators, as their cheers signalled, was almost equal for both sides. Quetta will win this match, the 24-year-old Azeem Jan who had arrived in Karachi from his hometown Quetta earlier on Friday, said with a big smile even though Islamabad's Azeem Khan was smacking sixes during his swashbuckling 97-run knock. "I am a fan of [pace] Naseem Shah, but Islamabad's fan."

If PSL games were held at the Bugti Stadium in Quetta, what would be the response?

"Not even one seat of the stadium will be vacant," Azeem, whose brother was an Islamabad follower, predicted while pointing towards some of the semi-filled NSK stands.

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Fans still face arduous trek to National Stadium for PSL matches

KARACHI: The small crowds to the Faisal Mahmood Enclosure on Friday evening unambiguously became a long tedious walk of around 1.5 kilometres. Though the soil was not unbearable, thanks to the pleasant weather, it was pretty frustrating.

"This way," said a paramilitary soldier while pointing in the direction of the road leading to Gate No. 6, when asked about the way towards the Faisal Mahmood Enclosure after I reached the National Stadium.

To confirm his word and avoid hassle, a member of the police contingent was also asked. "Go straight; entry for all the enclosures will be made through Gate No. 6," he

responded. "Keep walking, go to Gate No. 6," said a couple of other security staff members with no signs of boisterous stadium-goers on the way.

To one's utter disappointment, even the tedious walk towards Gate No. 6 was not direct and passed through a nearby inner lane stretching further the distance to be covered.

All that despite the designated entry gate being Gate No. 1 on the ticket for the HBL Pakistan Super League encounter between Islamabad United and Quetta Gladiators.

And although barely one-third of the venue was filled, the spectators were lively making the atmosphere festive.

"I support the [entire] PSL; all teams are our teams. And we are enjoying a lively match today," the 37-year-old Zubaid Ali Wasil, a chartered accountant who was engrossed in the game, told Dawn when asked which of the six franchise teams he was supporting.

His nephew Taha Ali, a 15-year-old O-Level student, sitting next to him had a different view.

"My favourite team [in the PSL] is Karachi Kings. However, for [skipper] Shahab Khan I am backing Islamabad United today," Taha said amid a big roar from the crowd as Islamabad spinner Abrar Ahmed appeared successfully for LHB

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Akshay Kumar takes the blame for his films not working; says, "It is my fault, 100%"

Earlier this week, yet another film of Akshay Kumar hit the theatres. Selfies, co-starring Irrfan Hashmi, is an action comedy that is a remake of the Malayalam film Driving License. While the trailer and the remake of the song, 'Main Khiladi Tu Anari' from the film was quite well-received, the film failed to make a mark among the audiences. In a recent interview, the actor, who insisted on giving up his Canadian citizenship for Indian citizenship, also opened up about his recent failure at the box office. The superstar also requested everyone to not blame the audience, further taking up the blame on himself about his films not working.



In his interview with Aaj Tak, Akshay Kumar opened up about the performance of his recent theatrical releases, and said, "This is a great lesson, as a filmmaker, I should be asking myself why I am not getting as good as I had in my earlier films. It is my fault, 100%. As a filmmaker, I should be asking myself why I am not getting as good as I had in my earlier films. It is my fault, 100%. As a filmmaker, I should be asking myself why I am not getting as good as I had in my earlier films. It is my fault, 100%."

Kangana Ranaut Opens Up About Ajnala Police Station Attack

Actress Kangana Ranaut is known for never mincing her words. Ever since her Twitter handle was restored, earlier this year, she has been taking to the social media platform to vent her take on Bollywood and ongoing socio-political scenarios in the country. On Saturday morning, the actress had taken to her official handle to comment on Wazir Punjab De Chief Amrpal Singh's attack on the Ajnala police station in Amritsar, to free Singh's aide Lovpreet Tohlan.

It was pretty special: Meg Lanning on record-extending sixth T20 WC title

Australia captain Meg Lanning has termed their record-extending sixth ICC Women's T20 World Cup title as a "special" gift from the group, saying she was super proud of the feat. A dominant Australia on Sunday defeated hosts South Africa by 19 runs in the final to clinch a hat-trick of T20 World Cup titles and extend their domination in world cricket.



"It's pretty special from the group. All teams came hard as a but super proud. We felt like it was a good score but we have to bowl well. It was not as good as the semi-final. We had to put pressure on South Africa. It was about enjoying the process and doing what we were doing. It was about keeping things simple when the pressure is on," Lanning said after the win.

'Exactly the kind of challenge we need before WC' - Butler on Bangladesh tour

England captain Jos Buttler has said that their white-ball tour of Bangladesh is "exactly" the kind of challenge his side needs before a World Cup in India. Buttler said he's expecting the wickets to be "slow and low", giving his side the best chance to test themselves. "I'll be a great challenge for us. Obviously Bangladesh are very tough to beat in their home conditions. India as well. So this is exactly the kind of challenge we need, nearing the World Cup, not too far away, to test ourselves against probably conditions we won't see as a side until we find the hardest. This can be a great measure of where we are as a team," Buttler said.

Dunki director Rajkumar Hirani speaks highly of Shah Rukh Khan

Rajkumar Hirani is arguably the biggest director of Bollywood right now. He has delivered five films till now, all of which have become huge success and have tremendous real value. As a result, the expectations are tremendous from his upcoming film, Dunki. Monavir Khan and Shah Rukh Khan, who's on a roll after the blockbuster success of his recently released action entertainer, Pathan.



Rajkumar Hirani rarely gives interviews and mostly sticks to the media around the time of his film's release. As a result, it was a surprise when he recently spoke to India Today about Dunki. In this conversation, he expressed his love for Shah Rukh Khan and his work ethic.

Spain smash T20I records in two-ball chase against Isle of Man

The final match of Spain's home bilateral series against the Isle of Man at a Miegaus saw records tumble as the Isle of Man were bowled out for just 19 runs, with the hosts completing the chase in just two legitimate deliveries. Home seamers Mohammad Karwan and Adil Nabeesh bagged four wickets apiece at the cost of 4 and 6 runs respectively, with leg-spinner Lorne Burns chipping in two scalps at no cost.

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Tanzania both completed wins in just four balls. While Mali are a developing side in both the men's and women's game, the Isle of Man are far from habitual whipping boys in European cricket. Ranked just three places below Spain at 39th on the ICC T20I rankings before the series, only last year they came close to qualifying for the European T20 Qualifier Finals, topping their group unbeaten before being ousted by Italy in the Sub-Regional Final. The group had posted 132-8 in the preceding game, and while Spain had four one-wicketers before being bowled by the men's unbeaten series comfortably, there was little indication of what was to come.

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immigrants more likely to be employed than those born in Canada

Over the next three years, Canada will aim to welcome roughly 1.45 million immigrants, with 60% projected to be through economic class programs. This wave of newcomers is projected to have multiple positive effects for the Canadian economy, and a sizeable portion of which can already be seen, as Desjardins' new study on the impact of federal immigration targets reveals.

For instance, new immigrants are now more likely to be employed than their peers born in Canada. This is a recent phenomenon that comes down to the convergence of two major trends: A noted increase in the employment rate of new immigrants starting in 2016; and the gradual decline in employment rate of people born in Canada.

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Over the next three years, Canada will aim to welcome roughly 1.45 million immigrants, with 60% projected to be through economic class programs. This wave of newcomers is projected to have multiple positive effects for the Canadian economy, and a sizeable portion of which can already be seen, as Desjardins' new study on the impact of federal immigration targets reveals.

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Newly landed immigrants can also have a harder time gaining initial footing in the Canadian labour market, as they begin to establish themselves in Canada. These findings have raised questions on whether Canada is prepared for the massive wave of immigrants it plans to welcome in the next three years.

The being said, there are still good signs that newcomers will have positive labour outcomes. Job vacancies are currently at record highs and double what they were during the pandemic. The labour market remains tight-knit, one of the key reasons behind historic immigration targets. In addition to an aging population exiting the workforce every year, associations with in-demand skills and desirable human capital factors seem more likely to have favourable outcomes in the Canadian labour market.

Iraqi president says country now peaceful, life is returning

BAGHDAD - Nearly 20 years after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein by U.S.-led forces, Iraqi President Abdul Latif Rashid wants the world to know his country now has peace, democracy and is intent on rebuilding economic life while maintaining a government that serves the whole country and the region.

Rashid told the Associated Press on Sunday that after overcoming the hardships of the past two decades, Iraq is ready to focus on improving everyday life for its people. Those hardships included years of resistance to foreign troops, violence between Sunnis and Shiites, and attacks by Islamic State group extremists who once controlled large areas, including Iraq's second-largest city, Mosul.



Rashid told the Associated Press on Sunday that after overcoming the hardships of the past two decades, Iraq is ready to focus on improving everyday life for its people. Those hardships included years of resistance to foreign troops, violence between Sunnis and Shiites, and attacks by Islamic State group extremists who once controlled large areas, including Iraq's second-largest city, Mosul.

"Peace and security is all over the country, and I would be very glad if you will report that and emphasize on that, instead of giving a picture of Iraq ... still (as) a war zone, which is a lot of media still do," Rashid said.

While Iraq's major fighting has ended, there have been some recent outbreaks of violence - including on the day of Rashid's election, which came after a yearlong stalemate following the October 2021 election. Ahead of the vote, at least nine rockets targeted Iraq's Parliament inside Baghdad's fortified Green Zone.

After Rashid's election, he nominated Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani, who formed a government with the backing of a coalition of Iran-backed parties and with promises of improving security and public services.

Despite its oil wealth, Iraq's infrastructure remains weak. Private generators fill in for the hours of daily state electricity cuts. Long-promised public transportation projects, including a Baghdad metro, have not come to fruition.

Rashid said this is due to damage as a result of conflicts and as a result of war, as a result of a number of years living war.

Government critics say the spurring electricity supply is also a result of endemic corruption, rooted in the country's sectarian power-sharing system that allows political elites to use patronage networks to consolidate power.

Rashid, who spoke at his presidential quarters in Saddam's former palace, also asserted that most Iraqis believe the 2003 invasion of Saddam-led Iraq by the United States and its allies was necessary because of the former dictator's brutality.

"He said he believes most Iraqis, including all sections of the society, the Kurds, the Sunnis, the Christians, the Shiites, were all against" Saddam and appreciate that the U.S. and its allies came to "save" Iraq.

"Obviously certain things did not work out as we hoped. Nobody expected Daesh (the Islamic State group) and nobody expected car bombs," he said. "It should have been controlled right from the beginning. It should have been studied and planned out right from the beginning. I think the myth was that once Saddam is removed, Iraq becomes heaven."

The reality proved more difficult, he said, but it hasn't weakened Iraq's commitment to democracy.

"Even if you have conflicts and if we have arguments, it's much better to have a freedom and democracy rather than dictatorship," he said.

However, mass anti-government demonstrations that kicked off in late 2019 were often met with force. Hundreds of protesters were killed by security forces and state-backed armed groups.

Rashid acknowledged there are still conflicts, but argued Iraqis, particularly the younger generation, to be patient and have faith in the future. "We don't have much choice but to live together ... and let our democratic election take place to represent our values," said Rashid, a veteran Kurdish politician and former war minister after Saddam's ouster.

Rashid assumed the presidency in October. Under Iraq's unofficial power-sharing arrangement, the country's president is always a Kurd, the prime minister a Shiite and the parliament speaker a Sunni.

Rashid's job entails helping to maintain a delicate balance among Iraq's various centers of political power and even-keeled relations with both the U.S. and Iran, the government's two key - and often opposing - international backers.

The balancing act is reflected in a monument near Baghdad airport. It

exalts Iran's Revolutionary Guard commander Qassem Soleimani, who was targeted and killed in a 2020 U.S. airstrike.

Improving relations with neighbours including Iran, Syria, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Jordan is a source of strength for Iraq, Rashid said. Arab countries led by Saudi Arabia had for years kept a distance from Iraq, partly because of its ties to Iran.

He noted with pride that Iraq hosted a Mideast meeting of senior Arab lawmakers on Saturday and expressed the country's willingness to continue serving as a mediator in now-stalled talks between regional rivals Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Rashid also promised to take a hard line on corruption.

In October, reports emerged that over \$2.5 billion in Iraqi government revenues was embezzled by a network of businesses and officials from the country's tax authority. And in recent months, amid allegations of widespread money laundering used to smuggle dollars to U.S.-sanctioned Iran and Syria, the U.S. has taken measures to tighten Iraq's dollar supply, putting pressure on the economy.

"I admit, we did have and we still have some problems with corruption, but the government is very serious (about fighting it)," Rashid said, adding that the government and the central bank are taking measures to regulate transfers out of the country to deter money laundering.

Economically, he said, Iraq is focusing on rebuilding industry and agriculture damaged by years of conflict, and developing its natural gas reserves so as not to be dependent on buying gas from neighbouring countries - notably Iran.

Despite the country's devastation and inflation in recent months, Iraq's prospects are good, he said, buoyed by strong oil production and high global oil prices. Iraq economically is in a sound position and probably is one of the countries in the world which (does not have) a deficit in our budget," he said.

Canada-U.S. border policy, security new target of Republican lawmakers

A group of Republicans on Capitol Hill is turning its gaze towards Canada as it ramps up political criticism of President Joe Biden's immigration strategy.

Rep. Mike Kelly from Pennsylvania and Montana Rep. Ryan Zinke are launching a new congressional caucus focused on immigration, crime and national security at the Canada-U.S. border.

The "Northern Border Security Caucus," to be officially announced Tuesday, is being billed as bipartisan, although it's unclear if any of its 28 members are Democrats.

Republicans in Congress are usually far more focused on the U.S.-Mexico border, where illegal immigration is one of the Biden administration's weakest political flags.

But that may be changing, thanks to a steady increase in the number of "encounters" being reported at or near the Canadian frontier with people in the country illegally.

From October through January, U.S. Customs and Border Protection recorded 55,736 such encounters, more than half of the total number from the 2022 fiscal year.

Caucus members "are concerned about the increased human and drug trafficking along with the decrease in Border Patrol agents and lack of security, along the U.S.-Canada border," Kelly's office said in a news release.

"Recent news reports, along with data compiled over the past two years, show a surge in illegal migrant crossings and drug trafficking across the northern border."

House Republicans expected to attend Tuesday's launch include North Dakota Rep. Kelly Armstrong, Minnesota Rep. Pete Stauber, Rep. Claudia Tenney of New York, Michigan Rep. Lisa McClain and Rep. Tony Gonzalez of Texas.

Alberta signs 10-year, \$24B health-care funding deal with feds

Alberta has become the seventh province to sign an agreement in principle with Ottawa on health-care funding.

The federal government said in a news release Monday that more than \$24 billion is to be invested in Alberta's health-care system over the next 10 years.

That includes \$2.9 billion for a new bilateral agreement focused on shared health priorities and \$23.3 billion in an immediate, one-time top up to the Canada Health Transfer to address urgent needs, which include help for pediatric hospitals and emergency rooms, as well as addressing long wait times for surgeries.

The deal also aims to improve access to family health services, including in rural and remote areas and in underserved communities. Other goals include fostering a resilient and supported health workforce, improving mental health

care and addiction services and allowing access to Albertans' own electronic health information.

Alberta joins the four Atlantic provinces, Ontario and Manitoba in signing on to the health-care deal.

The agreements in principle are a first step to completing the \$196-billion, 10-year health care funding proposal that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau made on Feb. 7.

Alberta Premier Danielle Smith said in a written statement that the agreement will support her government's efforts to improve health care.

"We are leading the country in health-care reform and are focused on ensuring Albertans can access world-class care when and where they need it," she said.

"This is a productive first step and I look forward to continued discussions with the government of Canada on how we can achieve longer-term sustainable funding."

Shannon Phillips, Opposition finance critic, held a news conference in Calgary on Monday morning to discuss her expectations from the Alberta government when it unveils the provincial budget on Tuesday.

"There is no question that we've seen a lot of chaos and instability in health care due to UCP cuts," she said in response to a question about the health-funding agreement.

"Those cuts have come about as a result of giving away billions to already profitable corporations and are fundamentally a disrespect of public health care in a war with front-line workers."

"Anything that can stabilize that funding, I think, is a positive thing."

"But what we need to ask ourselves is what happens next? Do we really trust Danielle Smith and the UCP to make sure that we are investing in public health care in a way that makes sure that we can see a doctor or other health professional within a couple of days? I believe the answer to that is no," Phillips said.

Smith, Alberta Health Services' Jason Copping and Alberta Health Services administrator John Cowell were scheduled to update media later Monday on their plan to improve the province's health-care system.



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